



## HEALTHY SCHOOLS! HEALTHY KIDS!

*RI Department of Education  
in Collaboration with the  
RI Department of Health*

# Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*June 2002*

This summary presents selected information on health risks among public high school students based on data from Rhode Island's 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS is an anonymous and voluntary survey conducted in alternate years among randomly selected high schools and students statewide. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sponsored the YRBS in 32 states and 17 localities nationwide in 2001. The YRBS monitors health-risk behaviors that contribute to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and other health and social problems among both youth and adults in the United States.

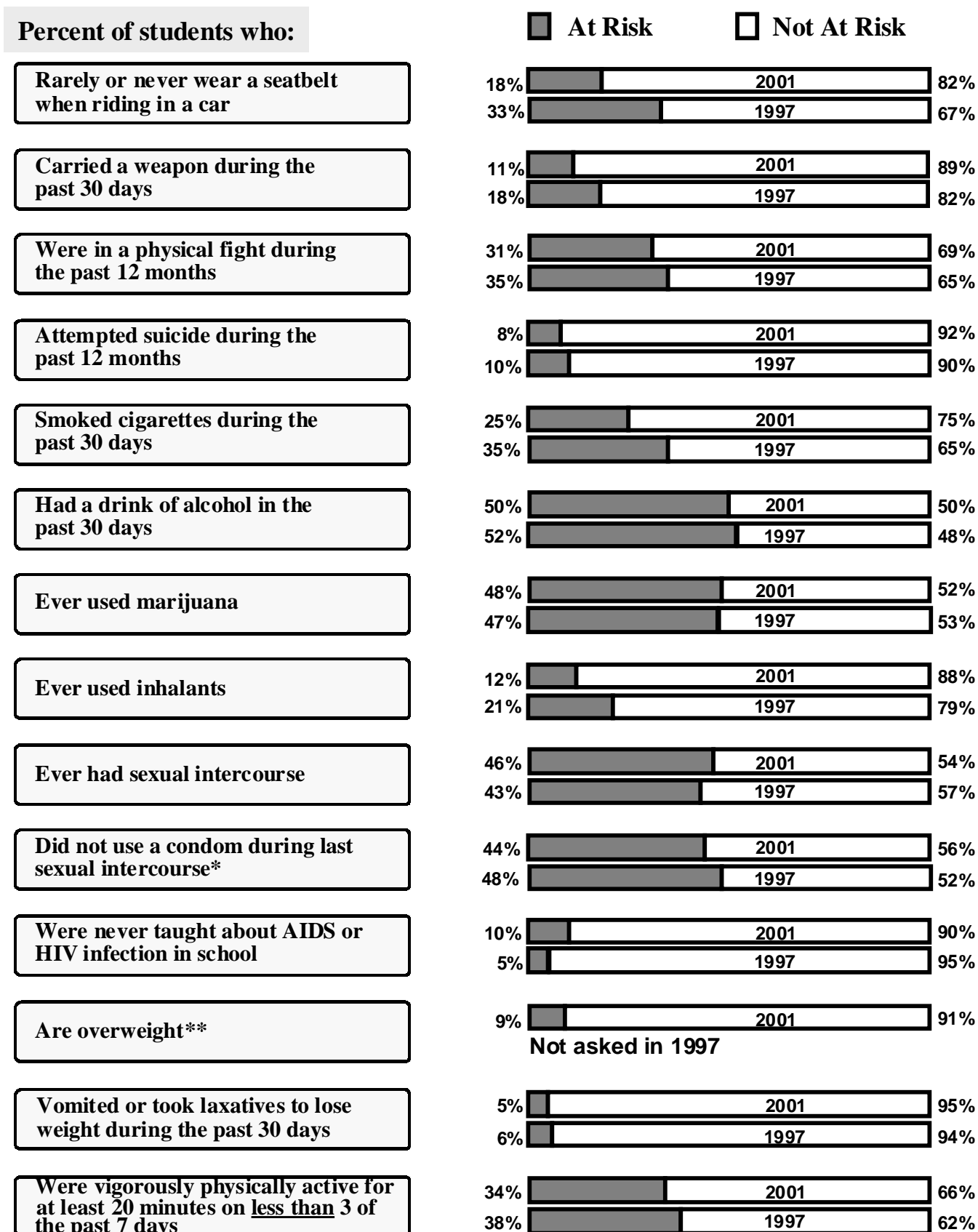
The Rhode Island Departments of Education and Health administered the 87-item multiple choice YRBS to 1,392 randomly selected Rhode Island public high school students (grades 9 through 12) during the spring of 2001. The overall response rate was 63%. The sampling protocol did not include students in ESL (English as a second language) or self-contained special education classrooms, as these students would have required assistance with the questionnaire that could have biased responses. Results of the survey were representative of all 43,616 Rhode Island public high school students in 2001. 1997 was the last time Rhode Island obtained valid, representative data from the YRBS. Survey findings from both years can be used to make important inferences concerning health-risk behaviors within this population.

*For additional information or more detailed statistics contact Cynthia Corbridge, RI Department of Education (401) 222-4600 ext. 2106 or Donald Perry, Office of Health Statistics, RI Department of Health (401) 222-7628.*

## **K** **KEY FINDINGS**

- ✓ The proportion of Rhode Island students at risk for 5 of 13 key health related behaviors was substantially lower in 2001 compared to 1997 (Figure 1). Areas of improvement included seatbelts, carrying weapons, cigarette smoking, use of inhalants, and physical activity. Students reported little or no improvement in physical fights, attempted suicide, alcohol and marijuana use, sexual intercourse, condom use, and vomiting or laxatives to lose weight. Lack of AIDS and HIV education was the one area where risk greatly increased. There was also 2001 data on overweight students which was not available in 1997.
- ✓ Physical fighting can lead to fatal and nonfatal injuries among adolescents. The 2001 YRBS showed that 31% of students were in a physical fight during the previous year, including 41% of males and 21% of females. Overall, 13% of students reported that they were in a physical fight on school property during the past 12 months. These percentages were slightly lower than 1997 YRBS results.
- ✓ Tobacco use is the chief preventable cause of death in the United States. Over 20% of all deaths are attributable to this behavior. Cigarette smoking increases the risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other diseases. In 2001, 25% of students were current cigarette smokers (i.e., smoked on one or more days in the past 30 days). The current smoking rate was much higher (35%) in 1997.
- ✓ Alcohol is a contributing factor in about half of all homicides, suicides, and motor vehicle crashes. These events are the leading causes of death and disability among young people. In 2001, 50% of students drank alcohol during the previous 30 days. Furthermore, 79% reported drinking alcohol in their lifetime.
- ✓ Nationally, suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth aged 15-24. In 2001, 8% of students attempted suicide during the previous year, including 6% of males and 10% of females.
- ✓ Overweight or obesity acquired during childhood or adolescence usually persists into adulthood and increases the risk for cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases. Among adolescents, obesity is associated with a variety of adverse physical, psychological, and social consequences. In 2001, 9% of students were overweight, including 15% of males and 4% of females. The proportion of overweight students was much higher in ninth grade (12%) than in twelfth grade (5%). However, these overweight estimates are probably low, as they are based on self-reported height and weight.
- ✓ Regular physical activity has multiple immediate and long-term health benefits. Lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for chronic diseases and premature death, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and colon cancer. In 2001, 66% of students, including 74% of males and 58% of females, participated in vigorous physical activity for at least 20 minutes, 3 or more times in the week preceding the survey. The overall percentage was slightly lower (62%) in 1997.

**Figure 1 - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, Grades 9 - 12, 2001 and 1997 YRBS**



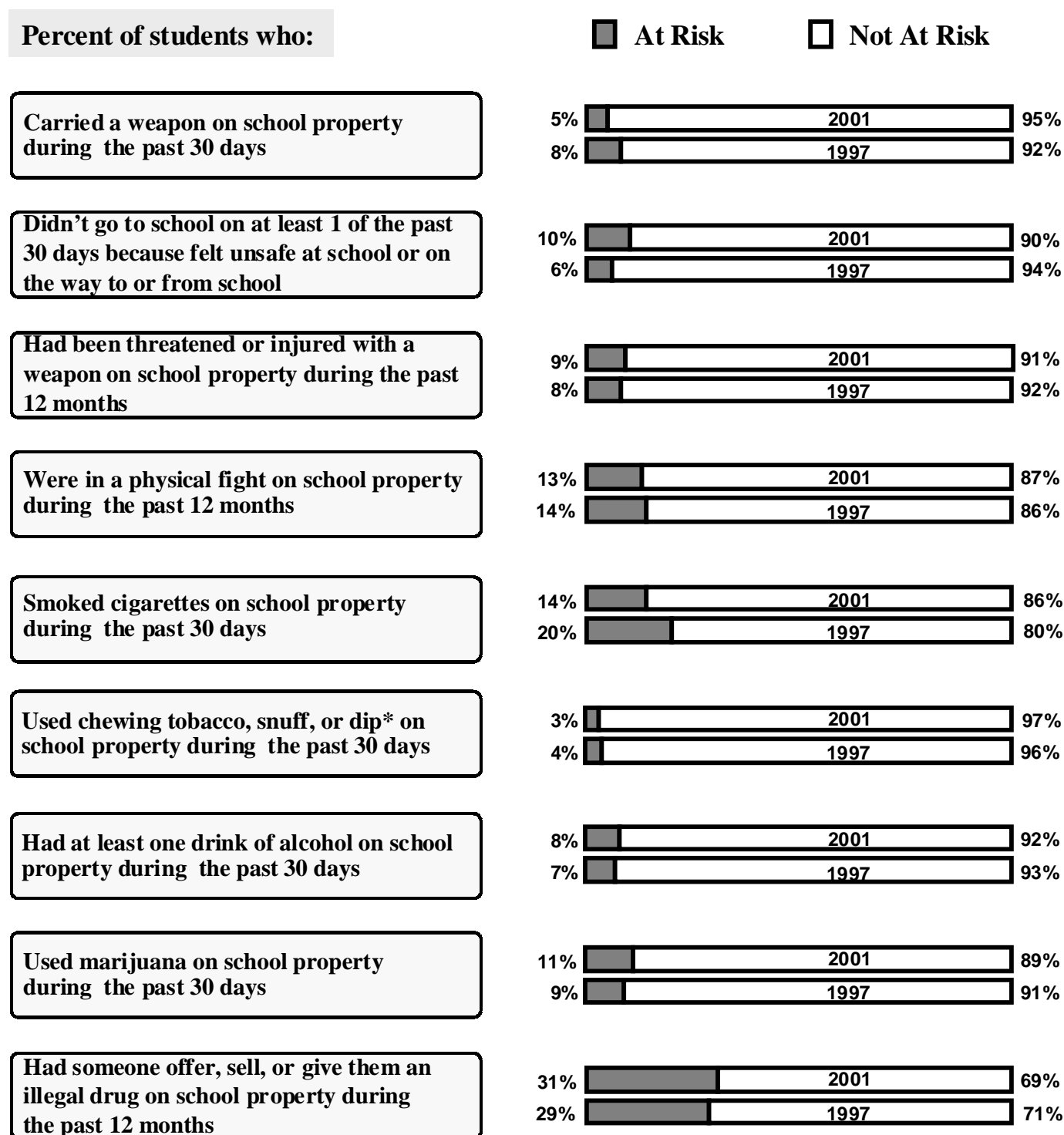
\* Of students who had sexual intercourse during the past 3 months.

\*\* At or above the 95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex based on reference data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I. Overweight percentages based on self-reported weight and height may be underestimated.

Source: 2001 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1392)

1997 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1528)

**Figure 2 - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, Occurring on School Property Grades 9 - 12, 2001 and 1997 YRBS**

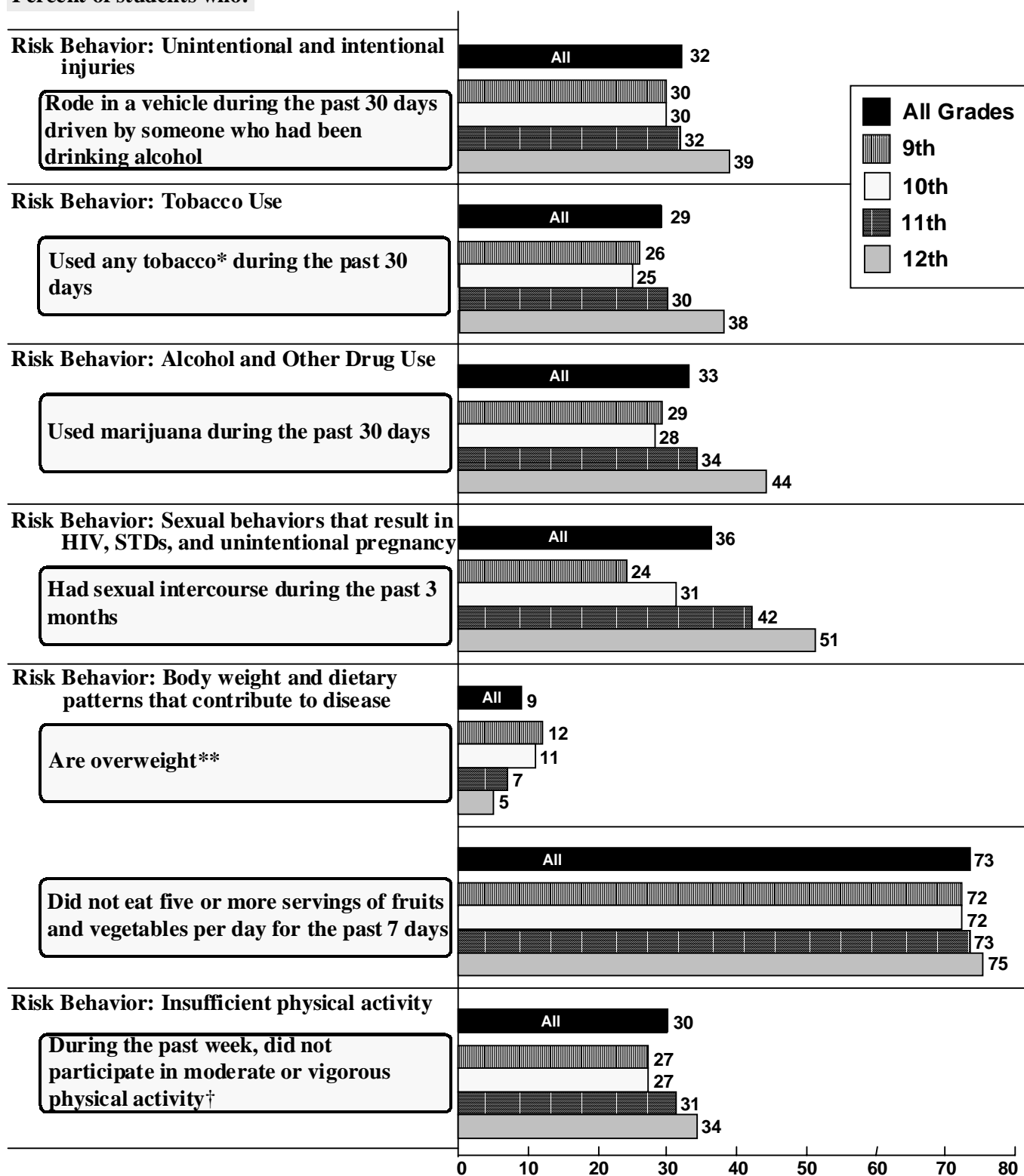


\* The 1997 YRBS asked about just chewing tobacco and snuff, whereas the 2001 YRBS asked about chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip.

Source: 2001 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1392)  
1997 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1528)

**Figure 3 - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, By Grades, 2001 YRBS**

Percent of students who:



\* Includes cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars.

\*\* At or above the 95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex based on reference data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I. Overweight percentages based on self-reported weight and height may be underestimated.

† Vigorous physical activity is defined as at least 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity on at least 3 days during past week. Moderate physical activity is defined as at least 20 minutes of moderate physical activity on at least 5 days during past week.

Source: 2001 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1392)